

LINDSEY O. GRAHAM  
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## UNITED STATES SENATE

December 22, 2022

Admiral Linda L. Fagan, USCG  
Commandant, United States Coast Guard  
2703 Martin Luther King AVE SE  
Washington, DC 20593

Dear Admiral Fagan,

It has come to my attention that several cadets were dismissed from the Coast Guard Academy earlier this year following the denial of their religious accommodation requests for the COVID-19 vaccine. The United States Coast Guard performs six essential missions to ensure the safety of our nation. These include maritime law enforcement, maritime response, maritime prevention, marine transportation system management, maritime security operations, and defense operations. However, these missions cannot be performed without robust and capable leadership, which the United States Coast Guard Academy provides to the fleet. The desire to serve in our nation's Coast Guard is an admirable thing and these young men and women who were dismissed, for failure to take the vaccine, should not be forced out at a time when our nation needs them the most.

As you may be aware, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 requires the Secretary of Defense to rescind the COVID-19 vaccine mandate that was authorized on August 24, 2021. I support this provision as I believe dismissing qualified individuals amid a historic recruiting shortage only hurts the ability of our armed forces to be prepared to respond to the threats emanating from around the globe today. However, I urge you not to wait for a legislative or court-ordered end to the vaccine mandate at the Academy, but instead immediately reinstate the willing young men and women back the Academy who were dismissed. I understand that the Air Force Academy, the Naval Academy and West Point allowed cadets or midshipmen to continue their studies at their academies during the fall of 2022, and continue to do so, despite those cadets being unvaccinated due to religious objections. There appears to be no reason the Coast Guard Academy cadets should be treated differently.

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter.

Sincerely,

Lindsey O. Graham  
United States Senator

cc:

Superintendent, U.S. Coast Guard Academy Rear Admiral William Kelly

W. GREGORY STEUBE  
17TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

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COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0917**

January 4, 2023

Admiral Linda L. Fagan, USCG  
Commandant, United States Coast Guard  
2703 Martin Luther King AVE SE  
Washington, DC 20593

Dear Admiral Fagan:

I write to you concerning the United States Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) cadets who have elected not to take the COVID-19 vaccine for religious reasons. Can you confirm there are cadets who were disenrolled from the USCGA and discharged from the Coast Guard earlier this year when their religious accommodation requests against the COVID-19 military vaccine mandate were denied?

These young men and women truly represent the best and brightest of America and serving in the Coast Guard as commissioned officers and Academy graduates was a major component of each their individual American Dream. Some of them immigrants, some sons and daughters of immigrants, some first-generation college students, all of them are “young men and women with sound bodies, stout hearts, and alert minds”<sup>1</sup> and they are “strong in the resolve to be worthy of the traditions of commissioned officers in the United States Coast Guard, in the service of their country and humanity”<sup>2</sup>. I request that you invite them to rejoin the service and bring them back to New London to rejoin their classmates in time to begin the next academic and military training term in January.

The vaccine mandate was repealed in the National Defense Authorization Act and signed into law by President Biden last month. Multiple lawsuits against the Coast Guard are pending which challenge the legality of the COVID vaccine mandate and/or of the Coast Guard’s denial of each of these cadets’ religious accommodation requests.

I urge you to do the right thing and bring these willing young men and women back to the Academy and to the service to which they have pledged their best efforts. I understand that the Air Force Academy, the Naval Academy, the Merchant Marine Academy and West Point allowed cadets or midshipmen to continue their studies at their academies during the Fall of 2022, and continue to do so, despite those cadets being unvaccinated due to religious

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<sup>1</sup> United States Coast Guard Academy Mission statement - <https://uscga.edu/mission/>, accessed 12/13/2022.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

objections. There appears to be no reason the Coast Guard Academy cadets should be treated differently.

The Coast Guard's readiness to perform its vital missions for our Nation and our citizens requires a robust, well-trained, and cohesive workforce. The vaccine mandate has reduced military readiness across all the services, especially in the Coast Guard, and eroded morale and unit cohesion as important positions are now unfilled, recruiting is down, and public confidence in the military is declining. Can you provide an assurance that going forward no cadets will be dismissed from the USCGA, denied a commission, prohibited from graduating, or otherwise discriminated against based upon their COVID-19 vaccination status? What are your intentions with individuals who were reprimanded, discharged, or penalized for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine or filing a religious exception? Will you work towards restoring both the readiness and the reputation of the USCGA?

Thank you for your consideration in this important matter, I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Gregory Steube', with a stylized, cursive script.

W. Gregory Steube  
Member of Congress

cc:

Secretary Of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin  
Deputy Commandant for Mission Support Vice Admiral Paul Thomas  
Deputy for Personnel Readiness Rear Admiral Eric Jones  
Superintendent, U.S. Coast Guard Academy Rear Admiral William Kelly